



Wesleyan and Keswick Models of Sanctification

I. Introduction

Much of contemporary Evangelicalism is indebted in some way to John Wesley and his theological understanding of the Christian Life, or Sanctification. Wesleyanism, various varieties of Holiness Theologies, Keswick, Deeper Life, Higher life, Victorious Life Theologies all have their root in Wesley's teaching concerning the Christian life.

II. Wesley and Wesleyanism

A. WESLEY & SANCTIFICATION

In the theology of John Wesley one finds a new direction, distinct both from Reformed and classic Arminianism Wesley built his understanding of the nature of man solidly upon the Reformed position of original sin, and the subsequent necessity of divine grace for salvation. Here however he parted company with the reformers and injected the doctrine of prevenient grace, (all men have received of the Holy Spirit the ability to respond to God) into his understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Wesley rejected the Reformed concept of election, opting instead for the Arminian concept of conditional election. Thus he joined the Reformed doctrine of the total sinfulness of the individual and the primacy of grace with the Arminian stress on human freedom, with its subsequent moral obligations. But his doctrine of Sanctification was not traditional Arminianism Wesley was also heavily influenced by the mystics. Packer has observed that he superimposed

"on the Augustinianism of the Anglican prayer book and the heaven aspiring High Church moralist in which he was reared a concept of perfection . . . that he had learned from the Greek Patristic sources. "Macarius the Egyptian" . . . and Ephraem Syrus were chief among these. There idea of perfection was not of sinlessness, but of an ever deepening process of all around moral change. To this idea Wesley then added the lesson he had learned from those whom he called the "mystic writers" (a category including the Anglican William Law, the Roman Catholics Molinos, Fenelon, Gaston de Renty, Francis de Sales, and Madame Guyon, the Lutheran Pietist Francke, and the pre-reformation *Theologia Germanica*) The lesson was that the heart of true godliness is a motivating spirit of love to God and man; without this all religion is hollow and empty. (*Keep In Step with the Spirit*,134)

Wesley asserted the primacy of justification, and the assurance the believer could have based upon the righteousness of Christ. However, his Arminian view of election creeps into his view of final salvation. He views the process of Sanctification as one of making the individual worthy of salvation. This process is a work of God, but it is also a work of man. At this point a synergism appears. At one point he explicitly states that good works are a condition of final justification which he regards as necessary for final salvation (Lindstrom, 207)

B. DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN WESLEYANISM

As Wesleyanism took root in America, it was institutionalized in the context of the circuit rider and revivalism. This had profound results on the form of the teaching. As early as 1784 Francis Asbury advocated preaching the experience of entire sanctification as one which believers should expect immediately by faith. Revivalism emphasized definable turning points in a Christian's life as essential. Holiness preaching tended to center around Wesley's sanctification teaching of a second crisis experience subsequent to justification which was commonly termed *entire sanctification*. From this followed it followed that it was the duty of those who had experienced *entire sanctification* to confess it and seek to bring others into this experience.

As Methodism became respectable, there was a call for a return to the pure doctrine of Wesley. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the National holiness Association was born to promote Wesleyan-holiness theology. Three names are prominent in the promulgation of holiness theology: Phobe Palmer; William Boardman; and Hannah Whitehall Smith.

Phobe Palmer's emphasis becomes key here. Although she says nothing that Wesley did not say a century before, she changes the Wesleyan emphasis subtly, and injects presuppositions foreign to Wesley. Whereas with Wesley the experience of perfection was something to be sought, for Palmer it was vital for continuance of salvation. For Palmer the crisis was vital. Perfection was the beginning of the Christian life and growth in holiness and the focal point of the Christian life. The focus of sanctification tended to be wholly upon a single point of wholehearted commitment, and divorced from any gradual process. "Thus, the moment of death to self and birth to love readily became an end in itself--a goal rather than an essential element in the establishment of a new relationship of freedom and love in the hearts of believers as the Holy Spirit led them from grace to grace in the will of God. (Dieter, 41)

C. KEY PROPOSITIONS

SECOND WORK OF GRACE.

For the holiness proponents particularly the second work of grace became vital for retaining one's salvation. Palmer particularly sees justification as dependent upon the believer's faithfulness. she states:

"As I ascended the heavenly way, clearer light shone upon my mind, revealing higher duties, requiring more of the spirit of sacrifice, and furnishing yet stronger tests of obedience. but with increasing light, increasing strength was given, enabling me to be answerable to these higher duties: for I had not *learned how to retain justification* while under condemnation at the same time for neglecting known duties."

For Palmer the solution lay in sanctification, envisioned as a post conversion crisis. She termed this a *crisis* because for her the issue was the retention or loss of justification. again she states:

"I saw I could not; I must either make the necessary sacrifices, or I must sin, and by my sin forfeit my state of justification. And here *my justification would have ended* with me had I *refused* to be holy."

Thus, the second work of grace is really the basis of one's continuance in salvation.

The means of achieving this second work of grace is conceived of as an act of faith akin to the act of faith involved in justification. William Boardman notes:

"Whether the question relates to justification or sanctification, the answer is the same. The way of freedom from sin is the same as the way of freedom from condemnation. . . faith in the purifying presence of Jesus." (*Higher Christian Life*, 81)

This same mentality persists to this day. in the Spring of 1986 I attended a Sanctification Conference sponsored by the C&MA in Piedmont CA. The keynote speaker, the president of the denomination began his first sermon with the words, "There are two gospels, the gospel of justification is for the sinner, the gospel of sanctification for the saint." Justification is seen as delivering from the penalty of sin, sanctification is seen to deliver from the power of sin.

For Boardman, this work of grace is a mystical inauguration into a process:

"In the one, atonement has been made, and the moment it is accepted, pardon is complete; in the other, although the righteousness of Christ is perfect in which the soul is to be clothed, yet the work of unfolding . . . is a work of time and progress." (40)

Hannah Whitehall Smith propounds the basic teaching of holiness theology by bifurcating justification and sanctification. Her contribution, no doubt reflecting her Quaker background was the injection of a quietism into the process. She envisions the process as an entire surrender to the Lord, and a perfect trust in Him. She envisions three steps to the process:

(1) The Christian must realize the gift of God.

"In order therefore to enter into a practical experience of this interior life, the soul must be in a receptive attitude, fully recognizing that it is God's gift in Christ Jesus." (*The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, 47)

(2) Consecration is necessary.

She states that the soul must be abandoned to God and lie passive in His hands (47) "To some minds the word 'abandonment might express this idea better than the word consecration. But whatever word we use, we mean an entire surrender of the whole being to God--spirit soul and body placed under his absolute control, for Him to do with us as He pleases."

(3) Faith then follows surrender.

"Love may be lavished upon us by another without stint or measure, but until we believe we are that we are loved, it never really becomes ours." (51) She concludes: "In order to enter into this blessed interior life of rest and triumph, you have to take two steps--first entire abandonment; and second absolute faith. (52-54)

While, holiness theologies come in many varieties and with various emphases, they all make the crucial disjuncture between justification, appropriated by faith and securing *pardon* from sin and sanctification/crisis/second work of grace/baptism by the spirit as a post conversion faith experience which breaks the *power* of sin.

SINLESSNESS:

In Wesley's mind sin was primarily voluntary and was thus intimately bound up with the will. In a sermon on 1 John 3:9 speaking of the privilege of sinlessness he defined sin in a wholly voluntary manner.

By sin I here understand outward sin, according to the plain common acceptation [sic] of the word; an actual, voluntary, transgression of the law of God; and of any commandment of God, acknowledged to be such, at the time it is transgressed.

Elsewhere speaking of the nature of sin he declared:

Not only sin, properly so called, (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law) but sin, improperly so called, (that is an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown) needs the atoning blood.

I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality.

Therefore *sinless perfection* is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself.

I believe a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions.

Such transgressions you may call sin, if you please: I do not, for the reasons above-mentioned. (Works: "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," 19 (XI, 396))

Wesley's hamartiology "emphasized the willful or spiritual dimensions of sin more than the outward (moral) or cognitive (theoretical knowledge) aspects of it. *Sinlessness* in this context was more a matter of willing God's will than replicating God's perfect knowledge, action, or holiness; *sin* was more a matter of knowledgeable and willful rebellion against God's will than a failure or lack of conformity to the glory of God." (John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 257.)

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION:

John Wesley saw Christian perfection which was available to all believers in this life as a gift from God and to be accomplished in a moment in time

- Christian Perfection is that love of God and our neighbor, which implies deliverance from all sin.
- That this is received merely by faith
- That it is given instantaneously, in one moment.
- That we are to expect it, not at death, but at any moment; that is, now is the accepted time, now is the day of this salvation

John Wesley was adamant about the instantaneous nature of this perfection/sanctification. His brother Charles however more and more brought the process to the forefront as the years progressed.

Wesley himself drew up a list of ten propositions concerning perfection which teach a progress-crisis-progress as a model for Christian perfection. In these propositions it can clearly be seen that Wesley does not understand the term *teleios* in the sense of mature (BAG,187) but rather in the sense of his own definition of sinlessness.

- There is such a thing as perfection: for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture.
- It is not so early as justification: for justified persons are to "go on to maturity." (Heb. 6:1)
- It is not so late as death; for St. Paul speaks of living men that were perfect (Phil. 3:15)
- It is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man, nor to angels, but to God alone.
- It does not make a man infallible: None is infallible, while he remains in the body.
- It is sinless? It is not worthwhile to contend for a term. It is 'salvation from sin.'
- It is 'perfect love.' (1 John 4:18) This is the essence of it; its properties, or inseparable fruits, are, rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks. (1 Thess. 5:16, etc.)
- It is improvable. It is so far from lying in an indivisible point, from being incapable of increase, that one perfected in love may grow in grace far swifter than he did before.
- It is amissible, capable of being lost; of which we have numerous instances. But we were not thoroughly convinced of this, till five or six years ago.
- It is constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work." (WORKS: "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," 25 (XI, 441-42)).

As can be seen from the above quoted propositions, for Wesley perfection was not the equivalent of maturity, but it was to be equated with sinlessness (i.e. voluntary transgression), or *love*. He explained perfection elsewhere as "perfect love." "I want you to be all love. This is the perfection I believe and teach." He was careful not to set perfection too high, recognizing the dangers of "high-strained perfection" which he said led to a thousand nervous disorders. Such high-strained perfection ("so high as no man we have ever heard or read of attained [it]") would have the unexpected result of driving Christian perfection out of the world.

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION:

This is “a personal, definitive work of God’s sanctifying grace by which the war within oneself might cease and the heart be fully released from rebellion into wholehearted love for God and others.” (Dieter, 17) This experience has negative and positive benefits. Negatively, it is seen as a cleansing of the heart, which heals the remaining systemic damage from Adam’s transgression. Positively, it is a freedom, “a turning of the whole heart toward God in love to seek and to know His will, which becomes the soul’s delight.” (Dieter, 18) Wesley listed the benefits of this sanctification:

- To love God with all one’s heart and one’s neighbor as oneself;
- To have the mind that is in Christ;
- To bear the fruit of the Spirit (in accordance with Gal. 5);
- The restoration of the image of God in the soul, a recovery of man to the moral image of God, which consists of righteousness and true holiness”;
- 5.Inward and outward righteousness, “holiness of life issuing from the heart”;
- God’s sanctifying of the person in spirit, soul and body; The person’s own perfect consecration to God;
- A continuous presentation through Jesus of the individual’s thoughts, words and actions as a sacrifice to God of praise and thanksgiving;
- Salvation from all sin. (Wesley, sermon “On Perfection”, Works 6, 413-15.)

D. SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT

Wesleyans claim that they approach Scripture holistically and do not rely on proof-texts for their doctrine, and that the holistic teaching of Scripture, its warp and woof, supports their doctrine of Sanctification. Nevertheless there are several passages which form the matrix of their understanding of the nature of sanctification. These include:

Deut. 30:6

Ezekiel 35:-26, 29

Matt. 5:8, 48; 6:10

Rom 2:29

Rom 12:1-2 Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

Phoebe Palmer a leader in the revival of Wesleyanism in the late 19th century gives a typical holiness exposition of this passage, placing it in the context of the altar of **Exodus 29:37**. According to Palmer, Christ is the believers altar. Since according to Exodus everything that touched the altar is holy, every Christian who was willing by faith to present himself without reservation as a living sacrifice upon the altar of the finished work of Christ would be entirely sanctified and cleansed from all sin. (Dieter, 39)

2 Cor 3:17-18; 7:1

Gal 2:20

Ephesians 3:14-29; 5:27

Phil 3:15

1 Thess. 5:23

Titus 2:11-14;

Heb. 6:1; 7:25; 10:14

John 8:34-36;

John 17:20-23:

Commenting on the **John 17** passage, Mildred Wynkoop has noted parallels with **Ephesians 4:**

Jesus had in mind a spiritually unified body of believers

That would bring glory to Himself.

He died to sanctify them. All other elements of redemption were included but incidental to this.

Sanctification was in word and in truth. This “word” obviously not the Scripture primarily, but was found in living fellowship with the living Word, who is himself Truth.

The commission was accompanied by a moral fitness--for the unity of the spirit indicated in both passages is moral clear through. (Wynkoop *Theology of Love*, 320, cited by Dieter, 32)

1 John 1:5

1 John 7-9

1 John 2:6

1 John 3:3

1 John 3:8-10

In commenting on this passage Wesley based his whole thesis upon his definition of sin as voluntary transgression. (see above), James 1:4

E. CRITIQUE

REDEFINITION OF TERMINOLOGY:

The Reformed have for centuries taken Wesley to task for teaching sinless perfection. While this charge is not really accurate, for the reasons shown above, Wesley himself must bear the blame for this charge because of his own redefinition of terms. Packer notes:

It was indeed confusing for Wesley to give the name *perfection* to a state which from many standpoints was one of continued imperfection. It was yet more confusing that he should define sin “properly so called”, subjectively, as “voluntary transgression of a known law,” rather than objectively, as failure, whether conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary, to conform to God’s revealed standards. It was supremely confusing when he let himself speak of sanctified persons as being without sin (because they were not consciously breaking any known law) while at the same time affirming that they need the blood of Christ every moment to cover their actual shortcomings. Wesley himself insisted that by the objective standard of God’s “perfect law,” every sanctified sinner needs pardon every day; that makes it seem perverse of him also to have insisted on stating his view of the higher Christian life in terms of being perfect and not sinning.

UNREALISTIC THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE:

Wesley at least saw the experience of perfection uprooting and eradicating sinful desire from the heart. His understanding saw this not only as a change in the moral nature but as effecting some kind of a physical change as well. (see Packer 140-141) This thread of Wesley’s teaching has been picked up by such groups as the church of the Nazarene in its teaching of the eradication of the sin nature.

SPIRITUAL ELITISM:

The injection of a second work of grace into the Christian life also leads to a spiritual elitism on the part of those who have attained this “higher life.” There is a subtle tendency to look down patronizingly upon those who have not had this experience. (One of my former students at Simpson recently told me he was going to write an article entitled, “my life as a second class Christian”!)

DANGERS OF LEGALISM:

Particularly in the holiness groups, the Wesleyan concept of perfection as perfect love was exchanged for what Wesley called “high-strained” perfectionism which seeks the absolute perfection of God. To achieve this high standard, sin was redefined in terms of external acts and equated with cultural norms e.g. smoking, drinking, dancing, hair length, makeup, movies. Richard Lovelace speaks eloquently to this problem. “. . . the conscience cannot accept sanctification unless it is based in a foundation in justification. When this is attempted the resulting insecurity creates a luxuriant overgrowth of religious flesh as believers seek to build a holiness formidable enough to pacify their consciences and quiet their sense of alienation from God. (The Dynamics of Spiritual Life, 104.) “The fully enlightened conscience cannot be pacified by any amount of grace inherent in our lives, since that always falls short of the perfection demanded by God’s law. . . such a conscience is forced to draw back into the relative darkness of self-deception. Either it manufactures a fictitious righteousness in heroic works of ascetic piety, or it redefines sin in shallow terms so that it can lose the consciousness of its presence.” (99)

PROBLEMS WITH EXEGESIS:

Wesley's Scriptural proof of his doctrine (see above) consist of either promises and calls to holiness (with affirmations that God will indeed finally deliver his people from sin) or they are statements of accomplished deliverance which the believer possesses now. "Wesley affirms that the promises find fulfillment in total and absolute terms in this life and appeals to declarations, along with the prayers and commands, to buttress his conclusions." (Packer, 139). In short he falls victim to a totally realized eschatology rather than seeing the tension of an "already but not yet" with reference to the Christian life.

Protestations notwithstanding . . .

Wesley in his own life did not rely upon justification for his acceptance before God. He looked to his state of Sanctification and there found that he was less than perfect. This caused him doubt of his salvation.

On October 14, 1738 he wrote, "I cannot find in myself the love of God, or of Christ. Hence my deadness and wanderings in public prayer...Again: I find I have not that joy in the Holy Ghost."

On January 4, 1739 he wrote, "My friends affirm I am mad, because I said I was not a Christian a year ago. I affirm I am not a Christian now. Indeed, what I might have been I know not...Though I have constantly used all means of grace for twenty years, I am not a Christian."

On June 27, 1766 he wrote to Charles Wesley, ". . . and yet (this is the mystery) I do not love God. I never did. Therefore I never believed in the Christian sense of the word. Therefore I am only an honest heathen."

COMMENT BY PT. FORSYTHE:

"It is a fatal mistake to think of holiness as a possession we have distinct from our faith and conferred upon it. That is a Catholic idea, still saturating Protestant Pietism. (see also Dieter, 14.)

III. Keswick

With Keswick one finds a different situation than with the Holiness Movement. Whereas Wesleyan holiness theology is traceable directly to Wesley and has clearly identifiable tenets, Keswick is much more amorphous and comes in many varieties from the strict Keswick of a Major Ian Thomas, John Hunter, Alan Redpath and the Torchbearers fellowship to the milder Keswick of Campus Crusade For Christ and Moody Bible Institute and other respected Evangelical educational institutions. Whereas Holiness theology has tended to dominate in Arminian circles, Keswick has tended to dominate American Evangelicalism of a more Calvinistic bent. Indeed Packer asserts that it has become standard in virtually all of Evangelicalism except confessional Reformed and Lutheran. (151)

A. KESWICK ORIGINS

IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS: HOLINESS THEOLOGY

Charles Finney & *Oberlin Theology*

Phobe Palmer & *Entire Devotion*

William Boardman & *The Higher Christian Life*

Hannah Whitehall Smith & *The Christian Secret of a Happy Life*

HISTORIC ORIGINS:

The term Keswick derives its name from a small community in the Lake district of England. In the wake of the Moody-Sankey campaigns there was an increased thirst for personal holiness and spiritual victory in the lives of many English Evangelicals. T. D. Harford-Battersby, vicar of Keswick was such a man. He had attended the Oxford meetings led by Robert Pearsall Smith and William Boardman 1874 and a series of similar meetings in Brighton the following year. At the Brighton meetings Harford-Battersby made arrangements to host a series of meetings the following year at his parish in Keswick, billed as a "Convention for the Promotion of Practical Holiness"

The first Keswick Convention hosted over 400 individuals, who met under the banner of "All One in Christ Jesus." The meetings have become an annual affair ever since. From Keswick the teaching quickly spread over England, Canada and the United States, with Moody himself being key to the propagation of Keswick teaching in the U.S.

The Keswick format is standardized. The subject of the first day's meetings is that of sin, which is portrayed in graphic detail. The topic of the second day deals with the provision through the cross for power over sin. (The Keswick understanding of [Romans 6-8](#) becomes key in this regard) The third day addresses the topic of consecration, man's abandonment to the rule of Christ as both *crisis and process*. The Fourth day focuses on the Spirit filled Life. And the final day focuses upon the necessity of Christian service which is seen as a necessary outcome of the Spirit-filled life.

“Keswick is not a doctrinal system, much less an organization or a denomination, which is perhaps why participation in it has been so broad. Though leading churchmen and noted scholars led the movement, *no Keswick leader has written a treatise on its teaching*. . . . There is no official doctrinal statement . . . and a broad variety of doctrinal positions have been held and taught by those associated with the name *Keswick*.”
McQuilken (153)

B. THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

THE PROBLEM:

The reason for the existence of Keswick is the perception that the *average* Christian is not a *normal* Christian according to New Testament standards. According to Keswick understanding:

“The normal Christian is characterized by loving responses to ingratitude and indifference, even hostility, and is filled with joy in the midst of unhappy circumstances and peace when everything is going wrong. The normal Christian overcomes in the battle with temptation, consistently obeys the laws of God, and grows in self control, contentment, humility and courage. Thought processes are so under the control of the Holy Spirit and instructed by Scripture that the normal Christian authentically reflects the attitudes and behavior of Jesus Christ. God has first place in his life, and the welfare of others takes precedence over personal desires. The normal Christian has power not only for godly living but for effective service in the church. Above all, he or she has the joy of constant companionship with the Lord.” (McQuilken 151)

The Keswick perception of the average Christian is that he is decent enough but there is nothing supernatural about him. When confronted by temptation he succumbs. He is characterized by self-interest

THE SOLUTION:

Keswick’s solution mirrors in many respects the Wesleyan-Holiness theology out of which it was born.

Appropriation:

Salvation (viewed comprehensively) consists of divine and human initiatives. God’s initiative is to provide salvation. Man’s responsibility is to receive it. Thus individuals are responsible to appropriate the provision for daily victory over sin as they are justification.

Means:

The means of appropriation of this victory have a clear affinity to Wesleyanism

1. Immediate abandonment of every known sin, doubt, indulgence, or conscious hindrance to holy living. *Rom. 6:12-14; 8:12-14; 14:21-2* and *Heb. 12:1-2*.
2. Surrender of the will and the whole being to Jesus Christ as not only savior, but master and Lord, in loving and complete obedience. *Rom 10:9, 1 Cor 12:3*.
3. Appropriation by faith of God’s promise and power for holy and righteous living. *Rom. 4:20-25; 6:2, 2 Peter 1:4* and *Heb 8:10*
4. voluntary renunciation and mortification of the self-life, which centers in self-indulgence and self-dependence, that God may be all in all. *Gal.2:19-20; 4:24,25; Cool 3:5; 2 Cor 5:15*.
5. Gracious renewal or transformation of the innermost temper and disposition. *Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23; 1 Pet 3:4*
6. Separation unto God for Sanctification, consecration and service. *2 Cor 6:14; 7:1* and *2 Tim 2:19-21*
7. Endowment with power and infilling with the Spirit, the believer claiming his share in the Pentecostal gift. *Lk. 24:49, Acts 1:8; Eph 5:18* (Arthur T. Pierson, *forward Movements of the last Half Century* (London & New York: Funk And Wagnall Co., 1900) 32.)

C. PRIMARY ELEMENTS OF KESWICK

THE PROBLEM OF SIN:

Keswick recognizes the battle of sin which the individual faces, and the defeat that issues from personal sin. Keswick sees man as a slave to sin, a master which holds his mind, emotions and will. By virtue of the Fall man is separated from God and sin is established in the nature of man. Keswick speakers and writers stress the reality of the sin nature and disavows the possibility of sinless perfection. Keswick’s understanding of sin involves six propositions:

- (1) Sin is an offense to God’s and rebellion against his purity and goodness.

(2) Sin is a ruling principle in man. Man is totally depraved. [Romans 6](#) and [7](#) describe this deplorable condition:

Chapter 6 shows man's enslavement to the sin principle, to be freed only through the New Master, Christ (6:6-7). Chapter 7 is seen through the eyes of a Christian, still helpless in the grip of sin. Many Christians find an all-sufficient atonement in Christ's death, yet have not found the secret of personal purity which lies therein. Sin remains as the ruling principle. (D. L. Pierson, *Arthur T. Pierson, a Biography* (London: Nesbet & Co., 1912) 287)

(3) Sin is moral defilement.

Sin has made man unclean, and unfit to approach a holy God. Even as a Christian "one small act of disobedience will throw him out of communion." (Hopkins, 16)

Numerous OT passages are adduced to support this proposition, among them [Isaiah 6:5](#): "Woe to me for I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." The power of sin is so intense that it is never broken

(4) Sin is a spiritual disease.

The strength of the sin nature is central to Keswick.

(5) Sin is an acquired habit

(6) Sin is an indwelling tendency

It is a tendency which remains throughout life. Keswick explicitly disavows eradication of the sin nature. Keswick's answer to this is its doctrine of *counteraction*. It is by the power of the Spirit that the power of sin is counteracted. The tendency to sin remains with the believer, but is the greater force of the spirit dispels this darkness of sin. If one walks in the Spirit the Spirit carries the burden of Sin. If one sins, the Spirit no longer counteracts the tendency to sin and the believer is caught in a spiral of sin. He has no more help in overcoming sin than the unbeliever

GOD'S REMEDY FOR SIN: THE KESWICK MODEL.

The remedy for sin stems from the new relationship which the believer enjoys with Christ as Master. Emphasis is placed upon the *power* of the risen Christ and the union of the believer with Him. *Recognition* of the believer's new identity in Christ is key at this point. "The heart and core of the Keswick teaching is its doctrine of sanctification by faith. The Keswick position is that in Scripture, sanctification comes by faith, and not in any other way." (Barabas, 100)

In the Keswick model there are four parts to Sanctification

1. **"gift"** (positional sanctification) [1 Cor 1:30](#).

2. **experiential:**

the day to day transformation which begins at regeneration and continues throughout this life.

3. **crisis:**

"By a deliberate and decisive act of faith, one may step into his rightful heritage of sustained victory over known sin; this we believe is what the word teaches as the *normal* Christian life. Constant defeat, grinding bondage and restless worry can be exchanged for a life of 'perfect peace'. The Bible shows that in Christ there is liberty and rest. This is to be obtained not by a lifetime of struggle, but by surrender to the Spirit of God." (Charles F. Harford, ed. *The Keswick Convention: Its message, Its Method, Its Men*. (London: Marshall Brothers, 1907) 6)

At the time of the crisis comes a realization that Christ is our Sanctification. ([1 Cor 1:30](#)) He must be accepted as such by an act of faith.

"Christ must be definitely accepted as our sanctification; if we wish to make any progress in holiness, we have to give up belief in the value of self-effort in holiness. The gift of holiness must be worked out in our daily life, but we work *from* holiness, not *to* holiness. To become holy we must possess the holy one. It must be Christ in us." (Hopkins, 68)

In the Keswick crisis the will is broken, and the believer sees his sin as willful rebellion against God. It may be accompanied by emotional remorse. As a biblical example of a Keswick crisis, Hopkins turns to Jacob. Jacob had wrestled with the angel all night. Now he no longer wrestles but clings and entreats Him to bless him. "This act of clinging symbolizes for us the life of victorious faith after we have yielded in a spirit of entire submission. You cannot cling until you have ceased to resist.." (65-66)

4. Ultimate Sanctification.

Transformation into the likeness of Christ after death.

CONSECRATION:

By this is meant full surrender. As a result of this surrender all areas of life are changed. Through this experience the power of God will begin to flow in the life of the believer

This full surrender is necessary because the self is totally sinful, and worthless. "We must hate and utterly lose our own life. . . So long as I myself am still something, Jesus cannot be everything. . . When your life is cast out, God will fill you; your life must be expelled." (Andrew Murray, *Full Blessing of Pentecost*, 69)

Keswick understanding of human nature in the regenerate man is dualistic. There exists the *old nature* which is totally sinful and is to be identified with the self. Beside the Old nature there dwells the new nature which is the part of the individual which has communion with God.

Keswick holds no hope for a transformation of the individual throughout this life. Instead it must be crucified, through the painful step of consecration

"Consecration is a sad and often painful episode, but one which needs to be faced frankly. Breaking away from the carnal conformity to the world and its bondage is not easy. But the alternative is to have a lack of power in ones testimony. . . partial dedication is always fatal." (Aldis, 54)

The crisis of consecration is passive, an abandonment of self which springs directly from Hannah Whitehall Smith's teaching on abandonment. This abandonment is an act whose sole responsibility rests with the believer. The result of this total self-abandonment is the fullness of the spirit and *rest*. Scroggie explains:

"Feverish service will be at an end. Not that we will cease to work, but there will be rest in toil, so that we may accomplish incredible things quietly and restfully. Then we shall have joy for "the fruit of the Spirit is joy." Another product is love for the Lord and his people. There will also be power--in Christian work, in secular work, wherever the Lord has put us. And there will be victory--consistent victory over sin." (Wm. Graham Scroggie, *The Fullness of the Holy Spirit*, 19)

THE FILLING OF THE SPIRIT:

This emphasis flows from consecration. The Keswick understanding of the filling of the spirit is rooted in [Ephesians 5:18](#) as seen through the exegetical lens of human sinfulness and absolute surrender.

Pardington illustrates the Keswick concept of the Spirit's control Thus:

A young art student sat in a national art gallery in Europe, trying to copy a famous painting by one of the old masters. He struggled and his work was poor. Finally he fell asleep over the canvas. He dreamed that the spirit of the old master took possession of his brain and his hand. Eagerly the old master seized the brush and rapidly reproduced the masterpiece before him. His work received the highest praise. It had a touch of genius. Then he awoke, only to be bitterly disappointed.

But beloved, your dream may come true Spiritually. We try to imitate Christ, struggling after perfect obedience, but at every turn we fail. Finally we give up. Then God gives us the vision of the indwelling Christ. He will unite himself to us, blending his life with ours. Christ will think through our minds. Christ will keep the law within us! He will destroy the dominion of sin and dethrone self in us. (George Pardington, *The Crisis of the Deeper Life* (Harrisburg Pa.: Christian Publications, n.d.) 149)

Keswick teaches basically that it is the believer's duty to take leave of his own personality so that Christ can make all the decisions.

D. CRITIQUE

VIEW OF SIN:

Keswick operates with two views of sin, one theoretical and one practical. One sees this in some measure in McQuilkin, but it is even more evident in the older Keswick writers. As noted above, from the perspective of the system, man is utterly and hopelessly sinful, sinful to the point that the *self* of even the redeemed individual cannot please God. Hence the necessity for the control of the Spirit (in the most literal sense) 1 John 1 John

From a practical perspective however, Keswick reverts to Wesley's definition of sin as volitional. Note the continued emphasis on known sin for one to retain the victory over sin arising from the spirit's control fullness/power/control

Consecration: I believe that the Keswick insistence on total abandonment of self amounts to an essential denial of the dignity of man as created in the image of God, an image which man retains even in his sinful state. If the self is worthless, why is it worth redemption to begin with? Teaching

which asserts the need of the mystical Christ to do everything is tantamount to spiritual suicide. The New Testament clearly places value on the individual because he is justified, and it clearly respects the personality of the individual.

WORK OF THE SPIRIT: CONTROL

In Keswick the Spirit's control or the filling of the Spirit is key to any relationship with God. However the Keswick concept of is filling akin to demon possession; While this may sound harsh and even shocking this is exactly the analogy McQuilkin uses to describe the Spirit's filling ministry

"When a person was said to have a devil (or demon), Scripture meant more than the person was devilish, or characterized by devil-like thinking or behavior. It meant that Satan, and his forces were the dominant influence in that person's life, at least at that point in time. Since the holy Spirit, like the unholy spirits is a person, this use of the term "filled with the Spirit" would seem to be appropriate. The figurative expression would then literally mean that the Holy Spirit dominated, had full control, possessed imperious claim to the whole being, though the domination would be gracious, by invitation only, and would not, like demon possession, displace or override one's personal choice." (177)

McQuilken then appeals to [Romans 8:9](#) as an example of such control (the NIV here used the term *control* but the Greek text uses the term *este ..en pneumatii*.) However the context of [Romans 8](#) is clearly drawing the contrast between believer and unbeliever, not between Spirit-filled and carnal (. . . if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 8:9b)

CONTROL:

The New Testament never uses the terminology of *control* to describe the believer's relationship to the Spirit. The terminology is more subtle, e.g. *leading*. In fact, a result of the Spirit's ministry on our lives is *self-control*, this would hardly seem possible if the regenerate self were still totally evil as Keswick claims.

PRACTICAL PERFECTIONISM:

The goal of Keswick is the peace and joy arising from victory over all known sin. While Keswick expressly disavows that a Christian can be sinless (perfect) for a lifetime, it expressly embraces a moment by moment perfectionism. As Packer notes: "The Keswick promise of complete victory over all known sin goes beyond anything that the New testament permits us to expect in this world. (see [1 John 1:8-10](#); [Galatians 5:17](#); [Romans 7:14-25](#). . .). The Christian's present righteousness is relative; Nothing he does is sinless perfect yet. Behind his best performances lies a heart too little fervent and motives too mixed, and as Jesus' judgments on the Pharisees show, it is morally unreal to evaluate an agent's acts without regard for his motives and purposes (see [Matt 6:1-6](#); [6-18](#); [23:25-28](#))

QUIETISM:

NATURES & THE CARNAL CHRISTIAN:

As seen above Keswick sees the old nature as something which is not subject to transformation, but retains its full force throughout one's life. No transformation by the spirit is to be expected. This clearly is in contradistinction to Pauline teaching which speaks of the progressive transformation of the believer into the likeness of Christ ([2 Cor 3:18](#); [Rom 12:2](#))

Hand in hand with this is the Keswick teaching concerning the carnal Christian, i.e. a Christian out of fellowship with God. Keswick basis its teaching on a misreading of [1 Corinthians 3:1-3](#). As Hokema rightly notes:

. . . There is no biblical basis for the distinction between "carnal" and "spiritual" Christians. The New Testament does distinguish between people who have been born again and those who have not ([John 3:3,5](#)), between those who believe in Christ and those who do not (v.36), between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit" ([Rom 8:5](#) RSV), and between the "unspiritual man" and the "Spiritual man" ([1Cor. 2:14-15](#) RSV). It never speaks of a third class of people called "carnal Christians."

The reference in [1 Cor 3:1-3](#) is not to such a third class of people but to immature Christians, to "mere infants in Christ" (v. 1). Though they are still infants, they are "in Christ." Their carnality is a behavior problem, which they must outgrow. Since they are in Christ, they are indeed "new creatures", ([2 Cor 5:17](#) KJV), "sanctified" ([1 Cor 1:2' 6:11](#)), and are spiritually rich ([3:21-23](#)) (187)

Holiness: In the Keswick model holiness is freedom from sin, not conformity to God's character, or even perfect love as Wesley contended. Thus, Keswick is very much anthropocentric rather than theocentric.

Packer notes: ". . . this makes it against rather than for, growth in moral and spiritual sensitivity. To make present happiness one's present purpose is not the path of biblical godliness. (151)

INTROSPECTION:

Another great problem with Keswick teaching in its various forms is the tendency to morbid introspection. If one's spiritual relationship to God is dependent upon confession of known sin, and absolute yieldedness, how can one be sure that he has actually confessed all sin. If a sin has been missed somewhere, the individual is still out of fellowship with God and devoid of spiritual power. Thus instead of a relationship with God producing holiness, Keswick demands holiness before communion. This mentality Harold Bussell rightly labels as *cultic* (*Unholy Devotion*,)

SPIRITUAL ELITISM:

As with Wesleyanism the post conversion crisis gives rise to the haves and the have nots mentality. Those who have experienced this crisis have a tendency to look down upon those who haven't as unspiritual.

SPIRITUALITY BY FORMULA:

While there is an insistence that the siritual life is a matter of a *relationship with the Spirit & Christ* (e.g. McQuilken) the means of establishing that relationship is formulaic. For Trumbull it was "Let go and let God." Andrew Murray gives a different list:

"The three steps in this path are these: First the deliberate decision that self shall be given up to the death; then, surrender to the Christ crucified to make us partakers in his crucifixion; "knowing that our old man is crucified", the faith that says, "I am crucified with Christ;" and then the power to live as a crucified one, to the glory of Christ." (*Holy In Christ*, 182)

Perhaps the most familiar formula is Campus Crusade's Holy Spirit booklet. These lists could be multiplied, but the point is the same. Spiritual victory s offered through the means of a formula. The test of one's spirituality is not the fruit of the Spirit in one's life but whether one has *by faith* fulfilled the conditions of the formula. This opens up another veritable Pandora's box. The whole point of Keswick/Victorious Life theology is to gain victory over sin and have a *feeling* of victory and the presence of God. Frank notes:

Naturally some who followed the steps very carefully felt no difference; to this the Victorious Life teachers replied that feelings did not count. This I believe , was the source of a great deal of confusion in the Victorious Life message, and it is also where one begins to smell the rat of charlatanism. The victorious life was offered to Christians, especially by Trumbull, as a whole new way to *feel*. What else can we make of the promises that worry anxiety and anger would be replaced by constant joy and peace. What is "happiness" if it is not a feeling? Any yet when confronted by a woman who said, "I have surrendered, but nothing has happened", Trumbull quoted C. I. Scofield: " 'there are so many people waiting for some feeling to confirm the action of God. . . ' Dear friends do not wait for another moment for feeling to confirm the Word of God. If you are resting on your feelings you are resting on quicksand. . . Victory has nothing to do with feelings; God's Word is true whether we feel it or not." (Frank, 149)

IV. Conclusion

Wesleyan-Holiness and in Keswick one finds two models of Sanctification which although they differ in detail are based upon the same bifurcation of justification and sanctification. Wesleyanism actually calls this post-conversion crisis a second work of grace. Keswick calls it a second blessing, although in practice there is a one to one correspondence with the second work of grace of Wesleyanism. Both models are ultimately perfectionistic, in the sense that they redefine sin, limiting it to volitional acts of rebellion (at least with reference to one's ongoing fellowship with God). The result is that an individual may at any point in time be described as sinless. Holiness sanctification historically gave birth to a legalistic mentality which often saw sin in terms of cultural norms. Keswick in effect made surrender and faith works, which had the effect of moving the legalism from the objective sphere to the subjective.

Having said all this, it still must be remembered that both positions had their positive features (Packer lists these, 136-137; 148-150) while they fall short in crucial areas. Both offered what Christians long for, a closer relationship with Christ. As Packer says " . . . When Christians ask God to make them more like Jesus, through the Spirit's power, He will do it, never mind what shortcomings appear in their theology. He is a most gracious and generous God." (165)

Further Reading

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Related Topics: [Sanctification](#)

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